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Michael Blanton: (00:01)

So you mentioned Tony Bland. Um, the investigation into Tony Bland is, is not completed. And the reason I say that is because I'm sure you followed that news and all of the defendants that were criminally charged in that case have now pled guilty. All of those cases, whether they plead guilty before trial or went to trial and they're all over now, um, now whether there's any appeals coming from those that have trials, I don't know. But what is still left is for the NCAA piece of all of those investigations for those universities that had coaches that were arrested, that includes us. So Tony Bland at the time was our assistant basketball coach. And as you know, he was arrested on, you've got the date exactly right there. September 26th, 2017 and I actually think of events both before that date and after. As it was such a significant day. Uh, so the investigation continues.

Beacon Project:

With Louis Freeh specifically?

Michael Blanton: (01:00)

No, that is over. That piece is over. So what the Louis Freeh piece, Louis Freeh and the Freeh Group International was hired by the university, uh, very soon after the announcement of the arrest to assist the university and specifically me and my office over in athletic compliance department with an investigation to determine whether the allegations against Tony Bland were confined to Tony or did they go beyond, both within the basketball program and the athletic department. That piece concluded and the good news is it was confined as far as the evidence that we were able to find and dig up. It was confined to Tony Bland those allegations. Now Tony has since admitted to some conduct in court papers, so that's going to instruct what we do with the NCAA and again there, I don't want to say onsite because they're not here, but their...their piece of the investigation has started and we're in the middle of it now. So that's about all I can get into as far as that.

Beacon Project:

With that specific report though, to my knowledge that's not public.

Michael Blanton:

There is, there is no specific report. I was part of that investigation. We didn't...you know, the Freeh Group wasn't asked to prepare a written report. They were involved with the interviews and the investigation of the documents that we came up with.

Beacon Project:

There is no physical...?

Michael Blanton:

There is not.

Beacon Project:

There is nothing.

Beacon Project: (02:44)

And then in regards to the internal investigation that USC conducted into Sebastian Ridley-Thomas tells us of the internal investigation in two Sebastian Ridley Thomas, uh, in July of 2018, uh, he was dismissed because of that internal probe and we were wondering whether or not there was a report in regards to that and whether or not that would ever be made public.

Michael Blanton:

There is no report into that, that is ongoing and you know, that entire matter has a nexus to what the United States government is also investigating. So that's again, one of those that I can't get into any specifics, but it has not concluded and there's nothing as far as a written report that I can share,

Beacon Project:

But his firing as a result of that internal probe, was the internal probe completed by the time he was dismissed or was it still, is it still ongoing?

Michael Blanton (03:41)

Like I said, there's no completion, any internal probe and I'm not permitted to talk about anything in relation to his retention firing or this is that California personnel records a lot of stuff

Lauren Bartlett:

And Austin, I can get for you the dates he was here.... I think you also wanted to share about the donation.

Michael Blanton:

Right, right, right, so I didn't know if this was reported or if you all were aware, but shortly after we'll use your date here. After the July, 2018 date, I'm assuming you all read the LA Times article. It was a discussion or release about a certain sum of money that went to a third party offsite after it came into us. Shortly after we learned of this, we requested that the funds be returned from the third party. That has occurred now as of the last, let's say 30 to 40 days, we finally got the money returned. What's more important perhaps is that almost immediately after we learned of the concerning transaction, we returned the, the sum that was donated to us.

Michael Blanton(: 05:03)

So that transaction, if you will, as far as the dollars are concerned has been, (inaudible), and that was something I was talking to Lauren because I wasn't sure if you all or the press knew of that so.

Beacon Project:

And then the Gibson Dunn and Crutcher report done by Debra Wong-Yang. Obviously, that's one of the reasons that you're here.

Michael Blanton:

It is.

Beacon Project:

Specifically, and there that report has been sort of the most doggedly viewed in that it was, it's been stated that it is going to be released and it is completed. And according to our research, uh, members of the academic Senate were given a verbal summary of that report. So it's clear that it's done and it's out there somewhere. People have it. When is that going to be released?

Michael Blanton:

So what you have is literally what I have. So my understanding is that verbal summary was given to certain academic representatives.

Beacon Project: (05:57)

It's the current president, the past president and the future president.

Michael Blanton:

As well as a certain or all of the members of the Board of Trustees. I don't know how many, um, it was not given to me. I am unaware of any written report. So when, when you're hearing verbal summary, that is what I've heard.

Beacon Project:

Okay.

Michael Blanton:

So I don't have it. So as far as the release of anything like that, I wouldn't know. And, and I, you know, I think you're probably referring to some comments that were previously made by, uh, just one of the Board of Trustee members.

Beacon Project:

Rick Caruso has stated that it's going to be released.

Michael Blanton:

Honestly, you know, he might be, I don't mean to send you over to Rick, but I think he's probably the better one to ask.

Lauren Bartlett: (06:33)

Yeah. And I think Sasha has an interview coming up with Rick in the next week or two. So maybe he can just add that to this list because I know that he's really the one who has spoken to this.

Beacon Project (06:43)

Okay. Um, and then I wanted, since I want to give her a time too, I'll wrap up quickly. Um, there was also a report, uh, by the law firm O'Melveny & Meyers. It was going to go into Tyndall and according to Rick Caruso, that would be finished by the time students return in the fall. Has, given that there's just about a month left. Has that report been finished and will it be published?

Michael Blanton:

So again, I'm going to have to send you to the, the, the folks that retained O'Melveny and Meyers on that and that is the board of trustees. Um, that one is difficult because it has so much ongoing litigation that you know, and I don't mean to keep referring you over to them, but that is,

you know, I, I do not have a report that is a report after a review done by O'Melveny. If there is a report, I'm unaware of it, but I'm really not the right person to talk to that.

Lauren Bartlett: (07:42)

Right. Because if there was a report it was requested by the Board of Trustees said, then it would be given back to the Board of Trustees. Chairman Caruso is the right person to be. Exactly. He's the point person.

Beacon Project: (07:54)

And then finally at one that I do know that you are aware of and have seen, which is the Cooley LLP report, um, the LA Times reported that you met with Dean Ellis last fall to speak about it with, uh, President Austin as well. And so that report is clearly finished and has been spoken about. And I was wondering where that report is and whether or not it will be published .

Michael Blanton:

So that the Cooley report as it's been referred to and anything dealing with Dean Ellis is again under that personnel confidentiality, privacy restriction. So I, you know, I cannot speak to anything that was in the report or even, you know, my meeting with Dean Ellis beyond, you know that that's tough. Personnel laws are strict and I'm bound by them, so I can't say anything more than that. I know that probably disappointing to you both, but that is the fact.

Beacon Project:

Can you share the main findings of the report? Something about it.

Michael Blanton:

I can't, if I get into anything. Right. It's just that that slope gets pretty slippery as soon as I start to disclose anything from it. So I can't get that.

Beacon Project:

Can you say who read the report?

Michael Blanton:

Who, what?

Beacon ProjectL

Who read the report?

Michael Blanton (09:23)

Who read it. I don't know. I mean, I can't, I, you know, I think the issue here is not that I can't give you a complete answer, which I couldn't. Um, what I can't do is start down a road on disclosure of, you know, the contents or who reviewed or what went into any decisions bearing on the Dean because then I'll find myself quickly sideways with California law.

Beacon Project:

Did you read the report personally?

Michael Blanton: (09:53)

I have read it.

Beacon Project: (09:58)

Um, why was Dean Ellis dismissed from the job?

Michael Blanton: (10:04)

Ooh, that I don't know. Honestly, that would be an action. That would be something that uh, others would have to answer if we could. I am, I don't know that date or, or whether he was dismissed. Honestly. And I don't mean to be, you know, focused too much on, uh, semantics or whatever it is. But I, and I would refer you to our HR department or...

Lauren Bartlett: (10:27)

Did, uh, Dr. Austin had posted, I think, I think there was a letter to the community, so I can check on that day for you. But I believe that there was something shared with the community that has a date, so I'm happy to look that up for you.

Michael Blanton: (10:43)

Do you all have that? Do you know if the, there, I think Lauren's correct or what? Something informing the community that would be if you had that here, I would read off of that and read you back that date.

Speaker 2: (10:54)

But it has been reported that he was dismissed because of allegations against Marshall about racial or gender or discrimination. Is that correct?

Michael Blanton: (11:07)

I can't confirm or deny any of that, that would be getting into things that I'm not even permitted to talk about.

Beacon Project

Was it because USC wanted to hire Garrett?

Michael Blanton:

I'm sorry, oh, did you say Garrett?.

Beacon Project:

Yes.

Michael Blanton:

Oh, I'm unaware of any reasons why, but again, I couldn't speak to those.

Beacon Project: (11:29)

Okay. Um, Dean Ellis said that there were 58 complaints against Marshall over the 10 years. Could you verify or confirm that?

Speaker 1: (11:45)

I can't talk about any of the contents of that report, but what about those reports?

Beacon Project:

What about those specific complaints? Would that be sent to your office? Not, obviously, not before you took the position, but after, if there were any of those 58 complaints that were made, would through this grapevine, they'd be funneled up to the Office of Professionalism and Ethics?

Michael Blanton:
If they occurred from this date forward?

Beacon Project:
From when you took the job at the OPE, if there were any number of these 58 complaints had been made during your tenure, would they have been brought up to the Office of Professionalism and Ethics?

Michael Blanton:
I, I couldn't speak to it. What I can tell you though is if, if someone at a school makes a complaint from this day forward under our current structure of a protected class type of complaint, 'Hey, I've received this mistreatment or I've been abused or discriminated against based on these issues,' it will make it through my office either directly to one of my umbrella officers or to me for triaged down to either OED or Title IX, that I can tell you. But I can't speak to anything specific to Jim Ellis.

Beacon Project: (12:53)
Um, Dean Ellis said that, there was no pattern of sexual harassment or discrimination at Marshall. So under your knowledge, could you say there is a pattern of discrimination of Marshall?

Michael Blanton: (13:06)
Again, I can't speak to any specifics about Jim Ellis.

Beacon Project:
I feel like most of the questions (laughter) are gonna go that way, which is understandable

Beacon Project: (13:16)
Okay. So can we talk about the process for OED when they receive a complaint?

Michael Blanton: (13:23)
I can certainly talk to you all day long about how we're dealing with it now since I've taken over. And that's kind of what I've, uh, some of what I've provided you here will give you that background. But if you have specific, I can tell you how the complaints process through any of these offices if you'd like, if we, and again, if you, if any of the school's staff or faculty receive or the subject of any kind of what we call protected class complaints and that's what dictates which office will take these. So in front of you...

Lauren Bartlett: (13:56)
Take a step back and explain what a protected class is?

Speaker 1: (13:58)
Ya, a protected class is any, any matter that is, you know, typically referred to as gender, sex, race, national origin, um, ethnicity, um, you both are generally familiar with. Does that make sense to you? When I say protected class, it's not in the way we draw the distinction. And it's difficult sometimes because when complaints come in, we don't know what the motivation of anyone doing anything is until we dig in a little bit. But if something came in, for example, and it was just this, this boss is, he's yelling and he's slamming his hands down on the table, every meeting is super uncomfortable. There's a whole group of us in there and it, it, you know, it feels bad every time I come to work on its face that does not sound like it involves a protected class.

But we would want to look a little more closely to determine who is in that meeting then does it occur all the time. But if someone were to come in and say, you know, I've been trying to get this, I'm in a more qualified and I overheard the boss say, I will never hire so-and-so because of x. You know, fill in the blank for some protected characteristics. That complaint would come in and depending on whether it was made against staff or faculty would dictate where it initially goes. If it's an employee and staff or faculty, both would go to OED for an investigation. Um, if that, if a complaint came in involving student versus student complaints, whether it's based on sexual assault or other son or some other protected class issue, title nine would take that if a complaint came in and uh, dealt with that kind of essentially bullying or some kind of work environment that was dangerous or didn't seem to be based at first glance on protected class, but made for extremely unpleasant work atmosphere or academic gap atmosphere. It would be housed in our OCAP division, which is relatively new, like my office in March of 2017 I want to say OCAP finally became operational. OCAP was initially created to be that division that kind of caught those non-protected class complaints that nothing should ever fall through the cracks. Right? It shouldn't be, well, your lady's here, your lens here, but if this complaint doesn't have a lane, I guess it just falls away that that never happens here. What our goal is to never allow that to happen here again. So OCAP is that division that takes those. If somebody comes in and says, I have a complaint, I saw a student athlete taking cash from you know this guy and here's a picture and you know that looks like an agent or something dealing with NCTA violations, athletic compliance, we'll handle that. These other offices. You can stop me if I'm boring you.

(laughter)

Beacon Project:
I want to talk about OED

Michael Blanton:
OED was your focus, right?

Beacon Project: ([16:52](#))
What's the policy to notify the deans about the allegations?

Michael Blanton:
So what's been done in the past is the deans are notified at the time of sanction at the latest. If if we, if there a need to loop in the deans for management purposes earlier during an investigation, it will be done. I can tell you that what I can't speak to is how the university did business before I took over. What I can talk to you about though as what the changes are that we're implementing now, and one of my, if I were to show you my, of my list of goals, one of them is to determine the need to know and when is it beneficial for Dean, not just deans but department heads. When can I enlist their help with a matter that's going on within the school without negatively impacting an investigation. And that is really the art of it, right? Because what I would, what you never want in the system, I don't mean to bore you with kind of best practices talk about investigations, but the integrity of an investigation and allowing the privacy to be in place until it can no longer be in place is paramount.

Michael Blanton: ([18:05](#))
If you have a person on person or an employee on employee investigation, the last thing you want is for more people that perhaps don't need to know or can't help it to know and try to

intervene while the investigation is continuing. It impacts negatively everything from other witnesses, willingness to come forward and talk to, you know, really the uh, the veracity of what's being told to the investigators. So long story short, there is policy changes even now foot on when is the earliest we can loop in deans and department heads investigations that don't necessarily involve the Dean or department head, right? I mean that part should be, I sometimes I forget, but in my conversations it escapes some that, well, if you're a witness or perhaps even the complaints made against you, you can't move those people in, right. For obvious reasons because of the integrity of investigation.

Michael Blanton: ([18:58](#))

But what we can do is hone and refine our process and get the deans with whatever knowledge we can provide them as early as possible and give them updates. And we're doing that not just for deans, but for all of our complaining parties. When I took over this office. One of the primary complaints I was hearing was I made a complaint six months ago. You never heard of it anymore. It had been that, I mean it's, you know, what, what is going on? The only thing I can think of as it fell off the cliff and you guys aren't doing anything about it. Meanwhile, I have to go back to work next to this person and I think, you know, you guys just circular filed my complaint. So what we've done with our new software platform is initiate some check marks or uh, reminders to all those investigators every 30 days. Whatever the protocol is, make sure you touch base with your material witnesses in your complaining party, if nothing else, to let them know where you're at and that you haven't forgotten about them because that communication is essential. And I tell you, if we solve that communication problem, half of the, you know, the complaints that we get about people feeling like they're not being paid attention to or their complaints just fall by the wayside would be solved. Hopefully the long winded answer addresses your question.

Beacon Project: ([20:15](#))

I just have a couple of rapid fire questions. Um, so just for clarification sake of those five that I've listed on that sheet, to your knowledge, none of those except for the Cooley report, which you have seen, have physical documentation of their investigations.

Michael Blanton: ([20:44](#))

I can tell you that whether they will someday or do now, I can't tell you. If that makes sense. Um, I wasn't involved at all with the Puliafito investigation. Um the only one that I have any personal involvement here is the Bland matter. And that is again, ongoing. Whether there's ever, you know, a report there, there is none now that I can show you or, or, or give you or you know, even if it were permissible, I can't tell you that there never will be. I don't know.

Beacon Project:

Why do you think that there wasn't physical reports that, like how was, how is accountability, how are changes being made without records of these findings?

Michael Blanton:

So your, you're focused on a, the creation of a formal written report, essentially a summary after the...

Beacon Project:

Right, of something that documents, what took place. And if, you know, there's been a lot of talk of like uh, function like functional changes being made to a lot of these departments and stuff, but without (inaudible)

Michael Blanton:

Well I just, I don't, and you know, I hear what you're asking.

Michael Blanton: (21:52)

I don't think it's necessary to have a final written report to effect significant reforms. I can put you right to that document as the evidence of it. Again, the Puliafito review and investigation prompted that 5-22-2018 action plan and that document, which is essentially just an excerpt from those 20 pages, but is, it defines my office's charter. Um, that's the perfect evidence why you don't have to have a formal written report to effect real meaningful change.

Beacon Project:

Okay. And then, uh, transitioning to the college admissions scandal, for lack of a better word, Operation Varsity Blues. Uh, is there a rep... is there an investigation going on? There's been, there was talk from President Austin that there was, um, who is conducting said investigation and of anything that has been found. Has anything been reported? Is it an internal investigation by your office? Is it an outside firm?

Beacon Project: (22:54)

There's, there's not been a lot of clear messaging on that.

Michael Blanton:

There is. I mean there is, there as you can. As you guessed there, there is an internal investigation. It is led by my office. I do have outside assistance. We continue to cooperate with the United States government's ongoing investigation. So beyond that, I'm constrained, but I can confirm for you that there is.

Beacon Project:

And you can't say who your outside assistance is?

Michael Blanton:

You know, I'd prefer not to. I don't think it's been reported. It's I think one day you will find out but at this point, again, I'm very, very conscious of the government's side of this and I really, I'd prefer not to say anything. And again, if I can find a way to, to let you know later on, I will, this isn't something that I think is that, you know, so controversial that you couldn't learn of it. I just, I'm very conscious of the US Attorney's office.

Beacon Project: (23:50)

And then to jump back to, uh, Tony Bland, you said you had knowledge of that, um, in your opinion, why do you not think, why do you think that, uh, Louis Freeh's firms investigation, found none of the evidence of other corruption in regards to Donna Heinel, uh, Jovan Vavic and the other athletic employees who are involved in criminal actions in that office?

Michael Blanton:

Cause it wasn't focused on that, the same information. Okay. So Tony Bland was, you know, if you followed it, and I know you have um, he's talking about a single transaction in the city of Las

Vegas, I think on July 29th, 2017, where, and I'm drawing from his, what he pled guilty to where he agreed to accept \$4,100. You're talking about a single transaction with some defined folks that they were entirely different inquiries.

Beacon Project: ([24:55](#))

Yeah. Uh, back on the complaints.

Michael Blanton:

Yes.

Beacon Project:

Just for clarification.

Michael Blanton:

Of course:.

Beacon Project:

If a complaint is dismissed or filed, um, are the deans notified?

Michael Blanton: ([25:06](#))

So do uh.... Okay. So let's all agree on terminology cause that'll help us. So complaints come in. So the complaints are the biggest number, right? So anybody can make a complaint. There's a vetting done when a complaint comes in. Part of that vetting is this is complaint. If true constitute a policy violation, for example, does it require an investigation kind of that next step or is there some other mechanism that we can intervene in lieu of an investigation? So you have big, the big circle if you take, you know, logic classes, right? The big circle is the number of complaints. The smaller circle within it is those investigations. Then you go to those investigations that are completed, which ones have findings and which ones have no findings. So terminology wise, that's kind of what we're looking at. Complaints, you know, determination of investigations need and then whether there's findings or not.

Michael Blanton: ([26:00](#))

So your question is asking whether or not a complaint that comes in, do we, is there some notification sent to a dean if a complaint is made. If the complaint results in an investigation, it will be disclosed to the dean and I'm just trying to think of that, which time period is really what we're working on now. Now if there, what we do get is a series of complaints. If there's a if there's a flood for example, or is there a trend that we could spot and I'm speaking to my tenure here, right? I didn't work here in '08 or '09, I started here January 1, 17. If there is a series of complaints that come in to my office, it comes to my attention. We will notify school leadership if that creates what appears to be a trend even if those don't result in individual investigations. But there's some information that can be gleaned from that series of complaints. We will share that. I don't know if you're asking about, you know, since I've taken over and forward or not, but that is how it's done now and we, you know, I, I don't know which deans y'all have talked to, but I, I'm in contact with a few of them quite a bit, not about their case, but just about, you know, their interest in making sure that we're all using the information efficiently and we're all working together.

Beacon Project: ([27:21](#))

Another thing, Ellis said that he was offered a contract to stay in his job one year, eh, only if he would remain silent. Maybe, I understand you can't talk about this specific case, but why USC offers that kind of agreement.

Michael Blanton: (27:39)

I don't even know that that's true or false. I have nothing to do with anything. If there was a discussion with Jim that, that Jim Ellis is testifying to that those discussions you just referenced were not with me. So I wouldn't be, I can't even, I don't know if that's true or not. I had no such discussions.

Beacon Project:

In regards to your meeting with him though. What can you say about that?

Michael Blanton:

There's nothing I can say.

Beacon Project: (28:05)

Um, does USC have a guideline that says women and people of color or minorities must be either in the applicant pool or interviewed for the job of a school?

Michael Blanton: (28:20)

That's a fair question. I would, I'm going to refer you to HR though, on that one. That I, I don't know the answer to that. Maybe Lauren could find somebody in HR we can direct that to.

Lauren Bartlett:

Sure. I'd be happy to check for you.

Beacon Project:

Thank you.

Michael Blanton:

It's really an HR question. I don't, um.

Beacon Project:

Last minute things, just thinking here. So, sorry for getting hung up on the physicality of report. But, you know, it's just an easy thing to track and, and yeah.

Michael Blanton:

No, and I hear you.

Beacon Project:

Keep track of. With any of these investigations, will the USC community ever have full transparency with any of those that have gone on.

Michael Blanton:

Full transparency, being...?

Beacon Project:

Knowledge or in, in, in substitution of a physical report, just a clear messaging as to what occurred.

Michael Blanton:

All I can tell you is that one of the goals of myself and my office is to become even more transparent entity.

Michael Blanton: (29:22)

I can't speak to any of those specifically, but I personally and you know, the university too is committed to being more transparent, more accountable, changing at the very least some of the perceptions that have existed out there for some number of years that I can tell you. Um, beyond that you know, I, I again invite you both and your colleagues to come and talk to me and you know, hopefully you don't report it that you were too frustrated today, but my door is open. The only thing that will impede us is my ridiculous schedule. So just give me a little heads up and you can work through Lauren and I'm happy to sit down and, and you know, when these things come up and tell you what I can tell you why I can't tell you for information, but you have that pledge for me and I hate to cut you guys off, but I'm already six minutes past.

Speaker 1: (30:15)

That's fine, just one last minute thing really quickly.

Lauren Bartlett:

That was my job was to,

Michael Blanton:

Oh it's ok, no I don't want to, I want to get you guys here.

Beacon Project:

Um, this has been more recent than any of us, but with the recent Courtwright, uh, Rick Courtwright lawsuit against USC, um, that falls very much under your purview with the reporting of complaints and stuff. And I was wondering, was there a lapse in addressing those complaints or in your view, what occurred in that case to create this lawsuit?

Michael Blanton:

So here's that other concept of confidentiality right.. It's active litigation. I can't say anything about it.

Beacon Project:

Well, that was an easy answer to that question. Anything else? Alrighty.

Lauren Bartlett:

So I will check on those, those followup issues. Do you have any idea what your publication schedule is for your stories?

Beacon Project:

No idea yet. I mean, we will, we'll let you know, we're in crunch time now. Obviously summer's almost over and schools about to start.

Michael Blanton:

Can we stop that. And then I just wanted to ask you a couple of off the record...

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